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NOTE VERBALE DATED 11 JANUARY 1993 FROM THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF GEORGIA ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Georgia presents its compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and has the honour to transmit the statement of Mr. Kavsadze, envoy of the Head of State of the Republic of Georgia, Mr. E. Shevardnadze, to the Security Council on the situation in Georgia.

We would greatly appreciate it if this statement could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

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Annex

[Original: Russian]

The Abkhaz conflict in the Republic of Georgia

Report by Mr. Sandro Kavsadze, official representative of Mr. E. Shevardnadze, President of Parliament and Head of State of the Republic of Georgia

Exactly one year has passed since the authoritarian regime in Georgia was overthrown and the Republic set out to build a free, democratic State. Since then, the situation has been extremely tense. An especially grave state of affairs emerged in the western parts of Georgia, particularly Abkhazia. Here were concentrated armed bands which terrorized the local population and committed acts of sabotage - blowing up bridges and tunnels, damaging the railway and so on.

In these circumstances, the Georgian authorities had to take measures to neutralize the bands and establish law and order. It must be pointed out that these actions by the Government of the Republic of Georgia were not supported by certain local leaders in Abkhazia, as a result of which that part of western Georgia was in fact transformed into a sanctuary and a bridgehead for groups of terrorists and bandits. Heading the local authorities was a former deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, Mr. V. Ardzinba. He was an active member of the "Union" bloc and was in charge of operations, together with Mr. Zhirinovsky, leader of the Russian Liberal-Democratic Party.

It is well known that the Union bloc and the party headed by Zhirinovsky comprised the most active opponents of democratic reforms and transformations in the Russian Federation.

As President of the Supreme Council of the Abkhaz Autonomous Republic, Ardzinba and his accomplices, not acknowledging the supremacy of the laws of the Republic of Georgia and acting from a position of strength, pursued a policy that ran counter to those laws and also the laws of the Abkhaz Autonomous Republic. Under the law on elections, Georgians, constituting 46 per cent of the population in Abkhazia, were represented in the Supreme Council of the Abkhaz Autonomous Republic by 26 deputies, while the Abkhaz, who made up only about 18 per cent of the population, were represented by 28 deputies. The remaining inhabitants (i.e., 36 per cent) of Abkhazia were represented by 11 deputies. That ratio enabled Ardzinba and his supporters to pursue a policy of apartheid. The leading positions, in violation of the lawfully-established rules, were filled predominantly by Abkhaz. The unlawful dismissal of the Minister for Internal Affairs of Abkhazia, a Georgian national, caused public outrage throughout the Republic. The illegal decision was backed by force: fighters supporting Ardzinba carried out a massacre in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, causing bodily harm to the Minister himself.

At the initiative of Mr. Ardzinba, an Abkhaz national guard was formed. That unlawful armed formation was, furthermore, composed along mono-ethnic lines - consisting exclusively of Abkhaz nationals - and as a result became the core of the rebel units.

Laws were adopted which restricted the freedom of movement of persons of non-Abkhaz nationality. Also in violation of existing laws, Georgian passports were issued to foreign subjects. Lastly, in July 1992 it was announced that the Abkhaz Constitution in force was being suspended.

In his address to the United Nations General Assembly at its forty-seventh session, Mr. Eduard Shevardnadze pointed out that a contemporary form of apartheid and an ethno-dictatorship had been instituted in Abkhazia, when the minority had become able to impose its will on the majority.

Mr. Ardzinba and his supporters openly sided with the terrorist organization "Confederation of Caucasian Mountain Peoples", which operated principally in areas of the western Caucasus of the Russian Federation. The capital of the Abkhaz Autonomous Republic, Sukhumi, was declared the capital of that Confederation. Ardzinba also created a special battalion as part of the armed formations of the confederation.

Meanwhile, the rampaging of the armed bands in the western parts of Georgia reached the point where it began to threaten the whole Republic. The railway - the major artery via which Georgia obtained its essential goods - was virtually blocked. The blowing up of bridges became a frequent phenomenon. Law-enforcement bodies were no match for bandits armed to the teeth. The Republic suffered colossal material damage. Georgia's neighbour, Armenia, found itself in a particularly difficult situation, the interruption of rail traffic bringing it to a state of seige. As a result of train robberies, Georgia owed Armenia more than 6 billion roubles at then-existing prices.

During those months, the opponents of democratic reforms both within Georgia itself and beyond its frontiers made all-out efforts to interrupt preparations for the elections to the Georgian Parliament.

At the beginning of July 1992, I took a journey through western Georgia, where I held meetings with representatives of the local population. Near the town of Tsalendzhikh, I and my fellow travellers were ambushed by armed assailants. One of my companions, the head of Administration of one of the districts, was killed on the spot. I was taken prisoner by terrorists, who carried me off to Abkhazia, where I spent 37 of my 40 days of imprisonment. At the beginning of August my fate was shared by more than 10 prominent officials captured by the terrorists. In addition to myself as Deputy Prime Minister, the Georgian Minister for Internal Affairs fell into the bandits' hands. All those taken prisoner at that time are able to confirm that the terrorists moved about freely and openly, both day and night, in the territory of Abkhazia.

In the light of that situation, the State Council of the Republic of Georgia took the decision to use Government troops to protect the railway, bridges and other means of communication and installations. Mr. Ardzinba was given prior notification of the decision by Mr. Shevardnadze, President of the State Council.

The ensuing course of events indicated that, by that time, Mr. Ardzinba and his accomplices had already made all the preparations for launching the anti-Government revolt.

At noon on 14 August 1992, acting upon instructions from Mr. Ardzinba, illegal Abkhaz armed formations suddenly opened fire on the Sukhumi battalion of Government troops. One guard was killed and several wounded. That was how the armed revolt began, how the ethnic conflict was provoked. The Government troops continued to move forward, overcoming the armed resistance of the rebels, and on 15 August took control of the railway station and other major installations in Sukhumi. At that same time the officials captured by the terrorists were released.

By that time Mr. Ardzinba and his accomplices had left Sukhumi, capital of the Abkhaz Autonomous Republic, and had set up base in the town of Gudauta. To avoid further bloodshed and possible casualties among the peaceful population, the Government forces halted their advance.

During the very first clashes, a significant number of hired terrorists were observed in the territory of Abkhazia, coming principally from the northern Caucasus. They had obviously been brought in previously; this is proved by the fact that Ardzinba and his clique, having enlisted the support of various forces, had already laid plans for the revolt and were merely looking for a pretext to begin it. It should be pointed out that the Confederation of Mountain Peoples, through a decree promulgated at that same time, had called for armed struggle against Georgia using terrorist means. That document is worth citing here. The decree states:

> "1. All headquarters in the Confederation shall arrange for the transport of volunteers to the territory of Abkhazia in order to put up armed resistance against the aggressors.
>
> "2. All armed formations of the Confederation, upon encountering resistance of any kind, shall engage in combat and shall strive to reach the territory of Abkhazia by any means.
>
> "3. The city of Tbilisi, capital of Georgia, is declared a disaster zone. In this connection, all means shall be used, including terrorist acts.
>
> "4. All persons of Georgian nationality in the territory of the Confederation are declared hostages.

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"5. All freight destined for Georgia and all means of freight transport shall be detained.

"6. Notifications of preparedness shall be communicated to the headquarters of the Confederation of Caucasian Mountain Peoples by 2400 hours on 22 August 1992."

The Confederation had succeeded in implementing part of its plans.

Mr. Ardzinba and his supporters did not conceal the presence of mercenaries in the rebel units. In his statements, Mr. Ardzinba described them as volunteers helping the Abkhazian people in their struggle against the occupiers and pointed out that houses and plots of land in the territory of Abkhazia were being given to them not as payment to mercenaries, but as a token of the gratitude of the Abkhazian people for their support. (It should be noted that these houses and plots of land belong to Georgian refugees.)

Meanwhile, the positions held by the Government troops, who had halted their offensive, were being subjected to constant attacks by rebel units. Taking advantage of the situation, the criminal bands of marauders and murderers stepped up their activities. In the situation thus created, Chairman Shevardnadze of the State Council of Georgia and President Yeltsin of th Russian Federation combined their efforts to put an end to the bloodshed. On 3 September 1992 in Moscow, Mr. Shevardnadze and Mr. Yeltsin signed the Final Document of the Moscow meeting. Mr. Ardzinba and representativrs of the northern Caucasus republics of the Russian Federation placed their signatures on the document.

In the document, the President of the Russian Federation and the Chairman of the State Council of the Republic of Georgia confirmed their commitment to the generally recognised principles of the territorial integrity of States and the inviolability of their borders, and respect for human rights and freedoms as well as the rights of national minorities.

In order to ensure the practical implementation of the provisions of the Final Document, a Verification and Inspection Commission was established, which included high-ranking officials from all sides concerned.

The Georgian authorities took specific steps to implement the provisions of the Final Document. In order to bring about a speedy cease-fire, the Government troops agreed to a compromise proposal and retreated a distance of 8 to 10 kilometres. Sukhumi and the adjacent territory virtually became a demilitarized zone and bloodshed was halted there.

The next important step was to disengage the sides along the Bzyb river. The resort cities of Gagra and Pitsunda were declared a demilitarized zone and came under the control of the observers. The leaders of the Gudauta group, however, in violation of the Moscow agreement, demanded and are continuing to demand the complete withdrawal of the Government troops. The rebel units, reinforced by terrorist mercenaries, repeatedly broke the cease-fire

agreement. On 1 October 1992, they attacked Gagra while a regular meeting of the Verification and Inspection Commission was being held in Sukhumi. I attended the meeting of the Commission and witnessed the events as they unfolded. The attempts by the members of the Commission to restore the status quo were not successful. The rebel units expanded their offensive, taking advantage of the small number of government troops (in accordance with an agreement they were withdrawn by the Georgian command), occupied the populated areas of Gantiadi and Leselidze and seized all the territory from the Gumista river to Georgia's border with the Russian Federation. During these days, more than 40,000 local inhabitants, primarily of Georgian nationality, fled their homes and crossed into the territory of the Russian Federation. Subsequently, they were housed in various regions of Georgia.

After the treacherous attack on Gagra, Mr. Shevardnadze visited the areas of Gantiadi and Leselidze and met with the people there. During one of the flights, his helicopter was attacked by an unidentified military helicopter, about which Mr. Shevardnadze made an official statement upon returning to Tbilisi.

It became clear that the Gudauta group was using the work of the Commission to gain time and achieve its goals.

According to data provided by the Committee on Human Rights and International Relations, as a result of the armed confrontation as of 14 January 1992, more than 600 persons had been killed, 2,150 had been wounded and approximately 600 were missing. The number of refugees exceeded 60,000 (we have accurate lists). This information was collected in the places that are under the control of Government troops. We have no corresponding information from the territory under the control of the Gudauta group. According to eyewitness accounts, a large number of houses, generally ones in which Georgians were living, were burned down. The peaceful population is not infrequently subjected to violence and torture. The exact number of persons killed is unknown.

The events that occurred in early October were preceded by a noticeable increase in activity by the opponents of reform and democracy in the Russian Federation. Under the influence of these forces the Parliament of the Russian Federation adopted, on 25 September 1992, a resolution that is at variance with the provisions of the Final Document of the Moscow Meeting and constitutes interference in the internal affairs of Georgia, and reports appeared in the Russian mass information media that gave a distorted account of the real state of affairs in Abkhasia.

Apparently, the actions by the Gudauta group serve well the interests of those who do not represent a republic of the former USSR any more than a province of the Russian Empire. In his original statement in Stockholm, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Mr. Kozyrev, painted a gloomy picture of what was to be expected if those forces were victorious in the Russian Federation.

I wish to point out that, in spite of the extremely complex situation, only 10 days after the Gagra tragedy, elections to the Parliament and for the post of Chairman of the Parliament were held in Georgia. These were truly democratic elections marked by great enthusiasm on the part of the entire population (elections were held in Abkhazia itself, except for Gudauta, Gagra and Tkvarcheli). Foreign monitors, representatives of various international organizations and journalists who had come to Georgia witnessed the fact that the people gave almost unanimous preference to democracy and expressed a high degree of trust in Chairman Shevardnadze.

From the very beginning of the armed confrontation in Abkhazia, the Government of Georgia has held the doors open wide to international organizations and representatives of information agencies, promoting in every possible way the collection of objective information about the events in Abkhazia. In the middle of September, a United Nations fact-finding mission arrived in Georgia, headed by the Director of the Europe Division of the Department of Political Affairs, Mr. Feissel. The delegation visited Abkhazia and met with representatives of the local authorities in Sukhumi as well as representatives of the Gudauta group led by Mr. Ardzinba. On 12 October a United Nations delegation led by Under-Secretary-General Blanca arrived in Georgia. This delegation also had meetings in Sukhumi and Gudauta. The situation in Abkhazia was objectively reflected in the letter dated 10 November 1992 from the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/24794). At the present time, United Nations observers are maintaining an ongoing presence in Georgia. Representative delegations of CSCE actively seeking ways to bring about a peaceful settlement of the conflict also visited Georgia a number of times. Representatives of the organization International Alert who had visited the area of confrontation put forward interesting views on this subject. We are grateful to all for their participation and assistance.

I wish to inform the Security Council that our experts and specialists - political scientists, jurists, persons who have studied the nature of conflict and others - firmly reject the view that there is an ethnic conflict in Abkhazia. In actual fact, even now, after hundreds of people have been killed and tens of thousands have been left homeless in the region as a result of the armed confrontation, the local inhabitants have not started fighting among themselves. Furthermore, they frequently assist families that have suffered and lend one another a helping hand in critical situations.

Mr. Ardzinba and his associates have managed to draw only part of the population into their adventure. Many Abkhaz who do not wish to take part in the fighting against Government troops are leaving Abkhazia. It can be stated with confidence that the Gudauta clique relies in essence on mercenary forces. By contrast, the National Salvation Committee, which has been joined by many Abkhaz, comprises the forces of the Abkhaz public at large. Prominent representatives of the Abkhaz intelligentsia are demanding that Ardzinba and his associates curtail anti-Government activities and quit the political arena; they describe his activities as a betrayal, first and foremost, of the interests of the Abkhaz people.

Neither is there any religious strife between the Abkhaz and the Georgians. Some Abkhaz consider themselves to be Muslims, but there is no active religious movement in Abkhazia. In this as in all other parts of Georgia, people of different faiths have for centuries lived and are still living together in harmony.

In light of all the above, we may confidently affirm the absence of any ethnic conflict in Abkhazia and firmly hope that the bloodshed and armed strife in the region will rapidly be brought to an end.

The Provisional Government of the Abkhaz Autonomous Republic, based at Sukhumi, is currently effective in that part of Abkhaz territory which is controlled by Government troops. The Provisional Government is supported by the National Salvation Committee, which was established on the initiative of prominent representatives of the Abkhaz intelligentsia. However, a significant portion of Abkhaz territory is controlled by the Gudauta clique.

In accordance with the reality of the situation, Mr. E. Shevardnadze, President of Parliament and head of Government of the Republic of Georgia, has addressed an appeal to the members of the Security Council. He believes that they will take measures to settle the conflict in Georgia which ensure the protection of human rights as well as Georgia's territorial integrity and State sovereignty.

For our part, we put forward the following proposals for consideration by the members of the Security Council:

First of all, we consider that the Russian Federation could make a substantial contribution to the settlement of the conflict. We, for our part, are ready once again to embark on implementation of the provisions of the Final Document of the Moscow meeting (of 3 September 1992), provided that refugees are allowed to return to their places of permanent abode and that the positions of the parties as of 1 October 1992 are restored. We are well aware of the major difficulties involved in resolving a problem of this sort but we believe that it can, in principle, be done.

Effective use can be made, in action to settle the conflict, of United Nations observers and forces. In the first place, it seems to us highly desirable that United Nations armed units or observers should control the boundary between Georgia and the Russian Federation (with a view to preventing infiltration by illegal armed formations and illegal deliveries of weapons).

It is most important that the railway and basic communications also be placed under the control of United Nations forces or observers. A resumption of rail traffic is of vital significance for the peoples of Transcaucasia and especially for Armenia, where the situation is desperate.

United Nations forces and observers could also ensure compliance with the cease-fire in areas of armed conflict near the towns of Sukhumi and Tkvarcheli.

Representatives of the States of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics could serve among the United Nations forces. In this connection we feel it is very important that officers from other States Members of the United Nations should be included among the forces' commanders.

A cease-fire, a restoration of law and order and a return of refugees will make it possible to prepare for elections to the Parliament of the Abkhaz Autonomous Republic.

We are in turn prepared to discuss any reasonable proposal for a settlement of the conflict. In this regard, it might be useful to send a group of military observers to the areas of conflict, with specific mandates and control duties, for the purpose of studying the situation in Abkhazia on a multilateral basis, drawing up proposals based on their findings, and securing the agreement of the parties concerned.

The position of the Georgian authorities with respect to a cessation of the armed strife in Abkhazia is based on unqualified respect for two fundamental principles:

the inviolability of the territorial integrity and respect for the State sovereignty of the Republic of Georgia; and

the protection of human rights.

We welcome any proposals which are not inconsistent with these principles and which lead us to the desired objective - peace and prosperity for all the peoples of Georgia.

S. KAVSADZE